OPENING STATEMENT OF
THE HONORABLE VERNON J. EHLERS
CHAIRMAN
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT, TECHNOLOGY AND STANDARDS
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Testing and Certification for Voting Equipment: How Can These Processes be Improved?
June 24, 2004
2:00 p.m to 4:00 p.m.
2318 Rayburn House Office Building

Welcome to today's hearing on how to improve the testing and certification of voting equipment.

Most of the national attention on voting systems has focused on the subjects of computer hacking and voter-verifiable paper ballots. However, recently the New York Times and other organizations have brought more public attention to the subject of voting machine testing, the laboratories that test the machines, and the development of standards used to conduct the tests.

All new models of voting machines sold in the U.S. today are certified by the National Association of State Elections Directors, after having passed a series of tests administered by Independent Testing Authorities, which are private laboratories. These tests are conducted to ensure that the machines meet certain standards for environmental tolerances, logic and accuracy, computer security, and other metrics that make them fit for use in elections. Voting machines must also be certified by individual States before they can be purchased by state or local election officials.

However, each election season, a small number of newly-deployed voting machines fail to perform properly in the field, causing confusion in the polling places and concerns over the potential loss of votes. Because these machines have already been tested and certified against Federal Election Commission standards, these incidents have raised questions about the reliability of the testing process, the credibility of standards against which the machines are tested, and the laboratories that carry out the tests. We must resolve this issue soon because States are already receiving billions of Federal dollars under the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) to modernize their voting systems. It is crucial that voting systems be easy to use, accurate, verifiable, secure, and reliable.

The Science Committee, through HAVA, gave the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) the role of improving the accreditation process of the laboratories carrying out the tests, and the standards against which machines must be tested and certified. Ultimately, NIST's activities under HAVA will improve the overall quality and performance of voting machines.

Unfortunately, NIST did not receive any funding for these activities for this fiscal year and the Administration did not request any for 2005. I am working with my colleagues to rectify this situation and provide NIST the money it needs. I am also encouraged that the Election Assistance Commission, which was created in HAVA to oversee overall voting reform, is requesting specific funding in 2005 for these important NIST activities.

I look forward to hearing from our distinguished panel on how best to improve the testing and certification process for voting equipment.